



20 Black Brook Road
Aquinnah, MA 02535

Phone: 508-645-9265
Fax: 508-645-3790

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Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, Chairman
24 Beacon Street
Room 212
Boston, MA 02133
Michael.Rodrigues@masenate.gov

Senator Cindy F. Friedman, Vice Chairwoman
24 Beacon Street
Room 208
Boston, MA 02133
Cindy.Friedman@masenate.gov

Senator Jason M. Lewis, Assistant Vice Chairman
24 Beacon Street
Room 511-B
Boston, MA 02133
Jason.Lewis@masenate.gov

Re: Our Strenuous Opposition to Senate Bill S. 2493 "An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots By Public Schools in the Commonwealth" as written.

Dear Honorable Senators Rodrigues, Friedman and Lewis,

I write on behalf of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah to express our strenuous objection to Senate Bill S.2493 "An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots by Public Schools in The Commonwealth" as written.

On July 19, 2021, Senate Bill 294 and House Bill 581 were reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Education. These bills were redrafted as S.2493 which now sits before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. While our Tribal Government wholeheartedly supports the premise that we are not mascots, and we absolutely support the removal of all negative, derogatory, denigrating or stereotypical names, images, sounds and/or actions used to or intended to mock or otherwise depict American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians (AI/AN/NH) in a less than respectful or positive light, we simply do not support this legislation as written. Nor do we support any legislation, which attempts to sweepingly remove all references to us as Indigenous, Native or Indian Peoples. Eradicating all references to us, which attempts to remove us from contemporary consciousness, erases our current existence, and ultimately relegates us into a marginalized existence in history, eliminating us as part of today's culture and society. This is not how to repair the damage caused by decades of negative terms and imagery, which created hostile learning environments for our children.

As one of the "First Contact Tribes", we, the Wampanoag Tribal Nation, who met and helped the original Pilgrims of Plimoth survive and ultimately thrive in this hemisphere, our history and relationship is unique and complex. After four (4) centuries, we have what is one of the longest standing government to government relationships in the United States. As such, the roots and foundations of this relationship goes far deeper than almost all Tribal/Colonial relationships. This includes the sentiments, intent and meanings behind and entwined within this relationship and its evolution. It would be a travesty, and a miscarriage of justice, to have the Massachusetts General Court enact any legislation that will directly or indirectly impact our Tribal Nations without our input. Any development of any legislation attempting to address issues concerning American Indians (or AI/AN/NH) in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must include consultation with us, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, and with each of the Massachusetts based Federally Recognized Tribes (and the state recognized Nipmuc Tribe, as identified in the 1976 Executive Order 126), to solicit our input, the actual Peoples who these decisions directly affect; and who are represented by Tribal Governments recognized by the United States and/or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as sovereign Tribal Nations.

Additionally, we cannot support S. 2493 as written, or any blunt and blanketed approach legislation, that would seek to prohibit a school, school system or town from working directly with the Tribe(s), to develop a respectful and dignified way to represent and honor the culture, values and excellence of American Indians, Alaskan Natives or Native Hawaiians and our AI/AN/NH Athletes. Such a collaboration between the Tribes and Towns and/or School Systems would not only uplift Indigenous Students, it would provide a platform to better educate Native and non-Native students regarding the tremendous contributions American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians have made, and continue to make, not only on the athletic fields; to also include those contributions in academia, the sciences, the arts, business and military service, both in America and around the world. There are several instances where positive and iconic imagery and recognition of Native Peoples have served this goal, including the example of the Seminole Tribe of Florida and Florida State University.

To that end, once again the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah most strenuously opposes Senate Bill S.2493 as written. However, we welcome an opportunity to work with the Massachusetts Legislature to develop appropriately written legislation, that will formally prohibit the disrespectful representation of American Indians, including Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians, and in contrast, allow for the continued dialogue to develop agreed upon respectful representations of Native culture and values, and to provide education and awareness of American Indians, not just as being relegated to the distant past, but to celebrate that we are part of the contemporary culture with our sustained traditions, culture and vibrant communities, who have made tremendous contributions in the foundation of this Country; and who have and continue to make positive contributions to the mosaic of humanity worldwide.

Thank you for your understanding and anticipated cooperation in this matter.

In Balance, Harmony and Peace,



Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais

Cc: Chairman Brian Weeden, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
President Shannon Holsey, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans
Senator Julian Cyr
Representative Dylan Fernandes